

Touch the Sky

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Summary: Merida gets to know a baby dragon on one of her visits to Berk. A few years later, she's in for a surprise!

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The small blue dragon rubbed its head against Merida's hand, and she gently scratched the scales at the base of the little horns.

Hiccup came over and ran a hand over the dragon's back. "It's interesting that this one is willing to be near you."

"Hm? How do you mean?"

Hiccup nodded and rubbed a spot under the dragon's chin that caused it to purr. "Yeah, this little girl's been pretty nervous around people. Won't eat if someone's watching her, won't test her wings if there's someone nearby. She's small, and I've had to keep her separate from her siblings so they don't beat her up."

"How can you tell it's a girl?" Merida asked, picking up the small creature and turning it this way and that to see if she could determine its gender. Nothing telling, though. The dragon hung relaxed in her hands.

Hiccup walked back to the pen of other baby Monstrous Nightmares. "Experience, mostly. Male Monstrous Nightmares tend to be larger and more red-colored than the females, and more aggressive, even when they're young." One he was reaching for snapped at his hand as if to prove his point. He rolled his eyes and grabbed a foul-smelling barrel. "Blue isn't common for a male, and the horns are shaped a bit differently, too."

Merida shifted so that she was looking into the little dragon's dark, bright eyes. "She's beautiful. Tiny and powerful and . . . almost magical."

Hiccup chuckled. "I guess." He finished dumping out the fish from the barrel he was holding, which the dragons swarmed over, yapping and hissing at each other.

"Aren't the parents supposed to feed them?" Merida asked, letting the dragon curl up next to her stomach. It was warm and smooth, and she could feel a little heartbeat thrumming away—"so alive, this tiny thing.

Hiccup nodded. "Yeah, usually. We found these eggs abandoned, though. I've done my best, but . . . " He sighed and shrugged. "I'm sort of a poor substitute for a mother dragon."

Merida smiled up at him and wrinkled her nose. "You sure? You certainly smell like you'd fit right in."

He shoved her shoulder as he walked past. "You try working with dragons for weeks on end, then talk to me about smelling like one," he teased. He stuck his head out the door and his playful smirk turned sour. "Ah, the thrice-blasted—"hey, we should probably go."

Merida nodded and stood, scooping the blue dragon in her arms. She put it down in its pen, separate from the others, and her heart broke when it clawed at her sleeve, whimpering. "Sorry, wee lass," she said softly, scratching the tiny head with gentle fingers. "I've got to go, and you've got to grow up big and strong." Her sight was getting blurry. She was not going to cry. "Promise you'll do that, okay? Grow big and touch the sky with those wings of yours." She pressed a kiss to her fingertips and touched the dragon's head, then quickly stood and followed Hiccup out the door.

Hiccup didn't say anything about her probably-less-than-conspicuous sniffs. Before they got to the main road, he said, "So, the baby Monstrous Nightmares don't have names yet. Do you have one in mind, maybe for the little blue one?"

She smiled and nodded, wiping one eye with her sleeve. "Wisp would be a good name, I think. A little ball of fire, blue as a summer sky, and just a little bit magical."

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><p>Merida hurried to the edge of the boat. "Can't this thing go any faster?" she cried.<p>

"We'll get there in good time, lass," Fergus called. "Why so fidgety, eh? Something to do with meeting up with a certain heir to the chief, hm?"

Merida scoffed and tried not to smile. "Of course not! It's just been two years since I've seen any of my friends on Berk, that's all!"

Her father nodded and smiled and said nothing more.

As soon as they pulled up to the docks, Merida leaped from the boat. Hiccup was there to meet them, and she leaped at him, ready or not.

"Ack!" he cried. "Help, I'm under attack!"

There was some polite chuckling from the surrounding people. Stoick told them to busy themselves with a tour or something while he talked with Fergus about the new treaty, and Hiccup lead her to the Dragon Academy.

"I've got somethingâ€"or someone, I guessâ€"to show you," he said with a grin.

They walked down into an axe-throwing class being taught by Astrid.

"A good aim is essential!" lectured the blonde Viking to the young class members. "Both you and your dragon should be as accurate as possible. Since you don't have dragons yet, that means working on your own strength and aim. I've set up targets for you to practice with. You all brought your own axe or hatchet?" The small Vikings hoisted their weapons. Astrid smiled. "Then get to it!"

She walked over to Hiccup and Merida while the class 'practiced.'  
"Hey, guys, what's up?"

Hiccup winked at her. "Oh, I was just going to show Merida our . . . ah, special student."

Astrid's eyes lit up and a wide smile spread across her face. "Awesome. Just let me finish up here first, okay?" She walked back to her class and started right in on giving the kid struggling the most some advice.

Hiccup and Merida sat on a bench against the wall and watched the rest of the class. Just under an hour later, Astrid cheerily sent off the slightly sore students, and she and Hiccup started clearing the arena.

"Alright," Hiccup said once there was a clear area in the center of the arena, bouncing on his toes. "Ready for this?"

Merida didn't even know what to think or do. She nodded and smiled.

Hiccup pointed to Astrid, who nodded and pulled a lever to lift the latch over a door.

"May I present . . . " Hiccup said grandly, gesturing to the opening door, " . . . one of the most promising . . . most loyal . . . most brilliant . . . and most spectacularly annoying dragons I've ever had the privilege to train . . . "

A medium-sized dragon shadow moved around in the pen, then stepped out into the light, the glossy cerulean scales catching the sunlight and reflecting gorgeously, the dark eyes glittering with intelligence and curiosity.

Merida sucked in a breath and whispered in awe, " . . . Wisp?"

The dragon threw its head back and roared powerfully.

Merida smiled and laughed. "Oh, by all theâ€"is that Wisp?" she asked Hiccup as she rose from her seat. "Is that really the little dragon from just a few years ago?"

"Yup," Hiccup said, coming up next to Wisp to scratch behind her jaw. "Dragons can grow pretty quick." Wisp shook him off gently and stretched her neck out towards Merida, humming happily. "And it looks like she remembers you!" Merida laughed some more and reached out to run her hands over the beautiful scales. "Of course, hair like yours is sort of unforgettable . . . "

Merida didn't even care that he had just made a jab at her hair. Well, she cared, and she'd deal with him later, but right now, she had just one thing on her mind. "Come on, Wisp," she said, moving so she could straddle Wisp's neck like she had seen other riders do. "Show me how to touch the sky."

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